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ADDRESSING EQUITABLE RECREATION IN VERMONT

Middlebury College,
Environmental
Studies Program

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that the state of Vermont, the lands managed by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and Middlebury College are situated on the unceded, ancestral land of the Abenaki People. Abenaki communities know their homeland as N'dakinna (pronounced enh-DA-kin-a, meaning "Our Homeland"), and have been stewards of this place for time immemorial. Abenaki generational knowledge and care for the land has persisted through centuries of violent erasure and dispossession, and, to this day, Abenaki people continue to live in relationship to the land.



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SUMMARY

This report outlines a preliminary plan of action for the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation as they work to center anti-racism in their efforts to make Vermont's public lands accessible, welcoming, and safe for all people. The information presented in this document is shaped by several principles, each of which derives from one truth: land ownership and access in Vermont has historically been shaped by white supremacy, the oppressive effects of which persist to this day. These principles, listed below, barely scratch the surface of the injustices that have been and are currently perpetrated against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color with land as the axis of harm. However, they offer a starting point to inform the urgent need for change in the management of public lands in Vermont, and provide context for the information presented in this report.

TRUTH

- Vermont's public lands occupy unceded Abenaki territory. Broader truth: the establishment of national and state parks and "public" lands was central to a centuries-long campaign to dispossess hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people of their lands on territory now known as the United States (Kantor, 2007).

TRUTH

- Land has been weaponized against Black Americans as a fundamental tool of oppression for the duration of settler colonial occupation of the region now known as the United States (Finney, 2014, pp. 36–39; Hannah-Jones, n.d., 2019).

TRUTH

- Common narratives of engagement with nature and the outdoors in Vermont exclude communities of color by erasing the past and present of their engagement with and stewardship of land. Broader truth: "whitewashing" erases Black, Indigenous, and People of Color from Vermont's collective identity (Vanderbeck, 2006).

OUR STANCE

- Abenaki communities deserve not only recognition of their ancestral territory, but unimpeded access to those lands and agency in their management.

OUR STANCE

- Working to ensure that public land in Vermont is truly accessible and welcoming to Black communities, though it cannot pretend to atone for centuries of violent exclusion, is an important step towards the redistribution of power and access.

OUR STANCE

- The common narrative must be reshaped to reflect the experiences of Black and Brown people in the outdoors, and to elevate their voices and stories in the intentional creation of inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces. Visibility is critical to individuals of color imagining themselves in certain spaces.

SUMMARY

TRUTH

- Access to outdoor spaces is critical to physical and mental well-being, but is heavily influenced by socioeconomic barriers that disproportionately impact communities of color (Rowland-Shea et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). In Vermont, the overall poverty rate is 11%. Broken down by ethnicity, poverty rates are as follows: White, 10.7%; Black, 23.8%; Hispanic/Latinx, 16.2%; Asian, 15.4%; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander/American Indian, 16.8%. The national poverty rate was 23.6% for American Indians and 22.5% for Black people, versus 8.1% for White people (Oyaga, 2020). These data do not account for the economic hardship faced by people living near the poverty line.

TRUTH

- Land power held by conservation organizations has been historically, and is still, controlled by white people, rooted in white supremacist ideas about the value and purpose of land conservation (Brune, 2020; Kashwan, 2020).

OUR STANCE

- As a state agency, the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation should redirect resources to circumvent existing socioeconomic structures in facilitating access to public outdoor spaces.

OUR STANCE

- The redistribution of land power, specifically to Black and Indigenous individuals and communities, has to start somewhere; why not in Vermont's state structures?

With these principles as a structure, this report details a number of specific actions that FPR can take immediately, in the short-term (3 months – 1 year), and in the long-term (1 year – 10+ years). Included in this list are recommendations to publish a statement in solidarity with Black lives, form meaningful partnership with Abenaki communities, and hire Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to leadership positions in a way that is both sustainable and non-performative, among many others. This list of actions requests that FPR examine its fundamental structures of power and management, and work to distribute that power more equitably. This report includes several case studies as models of implementation. It should be noted that no one historically white-dominated organization or institution has yet succeeded in reckoning with and deconstructing their internal white supremacy, which emphasizes that the work of undoing centuries of harm is a long-term commitment. By no means does this document exhaust the possibilities for anti-racist work, and centrally implicit in each action step is the need for more work. We hope that this document will serve as a starting point for sustained change within FPR and on Vermont's public lands.

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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR) tasked us with beginning the work of understanding and acknowledging the historic and current inequities in participation and representation of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and many other identity groups from outdoor recreation. It is important to recognize the political, social, and cultural moment in which this work was done: during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of uprisings and protests across the country in response to the epidemic of systemic murder of Black Americans by police officers. These events have led educational institutions, state agencies, businesses, and individuals alike to reckonings with their complicity and therefore active participation in the maintenance of structures of systemic racism and white supremacy. FPR now has the opportunity to acknowledge this crisis. In their 2020 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, FPR identified "Public Participation and Access for All" among their top priorities. FPR tasked our group with helping them gain a more fundamental understanding of the problems they should seek to address and outline an action plan of challenges and opportunities to push FPR to begin to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors. By contracting our group to begin this work, FPR is broadcasting the message that

increased inclusion and representation of BIPOC communities in the outdoors must be established as the new norm. Our recommendations range from establishing working, mutualistic partnerships with BIPOC outdoor advocacy organizations to eliminating financial barriers to access by funding a public "gear library." In the hope of recognizing our personal privileges and biases around this incredibly sensitive and important topic, our initial research allowed us the time to educate ourselves about the historical political, social, and cultural contexts that have constructed BIPOC environmental identities and relationships in our country to this point. To lay a strong foundation on which to base our recommendations, we compiled resources centering around the history of and current land use by BIPOC communities, historical relationships with land, and historical and modern exclusion and removal of BIPOC communities from state and federal lands. Our recommendations range from short to long term implementation and are grounded in the truths and stances we have taken after conducting extensive research over the last several months. We believe that following through with these recommendations will situate FPR to carry this work forward, to create sustained action beyond this moment of heightened collective attention.

A BRIEF NOTE ON LANGUAGE

As a group we decided it imperative to address the power and role of language in racial justice work. There are certain terms used throughout this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers, both those just beginning their journey to educate themselves about social justice and weathered activists. These terms include, but are not limited to, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), environmental and racial (in)justice, grassroots organizing, and many more. Through our research and conversations with people active in justice work, we have learned about the power of language to both strip away and give

agency to people belonging to underrepresented communities. You will find the capitalization of words like African American, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Only through engaging actively with this work did we learn the importance of these tricks of language in welcoming people to the metaphorical table and showing them much deserved respect. We hope that those who read this report will learn to recognize and appreciate the power of language and, upon encountering an unknown term, take the time to educate themselves and move forward.

BACKGROUND

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have always been in Vermont. In this background, we provide historical context for two groups who, despite having played significant roles in the state's evolution and sense of collective identity, are largely erased from present and historical narratives. Although we chose to focus on the experiences of Black and Indigenous people in Vermont, we want to emphasize that the state is home to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color of many plural and intersecting identities – it is impossible to capture the nuance of those identities and the histories that inform them without learning at the interpersonal level. This background does not pretend or attempt to account for all racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identities of Vermonters who experience systematic erasure. We urge readers to absorb this information for what it is: a general context depicting histories and stories of Abenaki folks and Black Vermonters. We caution against drawing conclusions about the experiences of individuals or communities based on this sort of generalized historical outline.

VERMONT ABENAKI – HISTORY, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

An important preface to this non-comprehensive history is the reminder that Abenaki people are still here. The purpose of this general history is to shed light on the present of the Abenaki by way of their plural pasts. The most authentic way of learning Abenaki histories is from first-person Abenaki narratives – this history does not pretend to replace the knowledge and understanding that can come only from learning from the Abenaki themselves. The hope, in sharing this second and third-hand history, is to begin to centralize Abenaki experiences in the conversation about access to public lands in Vermont.

The Abenaki people have lived on the land that is now known as the Northeastern United States and the Canadian province of Québec for more than 13,000 years (Abenaki People, n.d.). For context, Abenaki people have lived on these lands for a length of time that is 50 times longer than the entire history of the United States. Their homelands, described in the Abenaki language as N'dakina (pronounced enh-DA-kin-a), encompass the territory that is now called Quebec, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont (Cowasuck Band of the Pennacook-Abenaki People, n.d.). Frederick Wiseman's [The Voice of the Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation](#) describes how countless generations of Abenaki people learned to live in a highly variable climate, adjusting their diets and lifeways as the planet gradually warmed from the last glacial period. The resultant patterns of life were influenced

strongly by the seasons, and the seasonal availability of central food groups such as maple and birch sap, cultivated crops such as corn and squash, and hunted foods like fish and game (Wiseman, 2001). Although patterns of life may have been similar across the land, the Abenaki are not, and have never been, a monolith. The descriptor "Abenaki" includes dozens of unique tribes and bands with ancestral ties all across N'dakina. In Vermont alone, there are four tribes that are recognized by the state of Vermont, and several others that operate as unified bodies outside of the settler-colonial state structure. Vermont recognizes the Elnu Abenaki Tribe, who identify their ancestral territory as Southern Vermont (Elnu Abenaki Tribe - Home, n.d.); the Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation, who has traditional lands centered around the place now known as Newbury, Vermont (Our History, n.d.); the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki, whose ancestral lands are known today as Vermont's Northeast Kingdom (Picard, 2020); and the St. Francis/Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi, whose homelands stretch across Vermont's northwestern corner (Abenaki People, n.d.). For several hundred years, federal and state governments refused to acknowledge the existence of Abenaki people in Vermont. The state of Vermont's eventual recognition of these four tribes did not occur until 2011 and 2012, merely ten years after the Vermont Attorney General's office claimed that the Abenaki did not have a "continuous presence" in Vermont (Evancie, 2016).

BACKGROUND

VERMONT ABENAKI – HISTORY, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

According to Colin Calloway's book, The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People, Abenaki groups began to have contact with European colonizers in the early 1600s (1994, p. xxiii). Shortly following initial contact, European epidemic diseases such as smallpox began to afflict Abenaki communities, ultimately killing as much as 75% of the population (Bushnell, 2019). In 1675, a series of wars marked the beginning of substantial forced removal of the Abenaki from their lands (Calloway, 1994, p. 76). Following this period of explicit warfare and disease, there was a phased erasure of the Abenaki from the land. The first phase involved takeover by increasing numbers of settlers in the 1700s and 1800s. During this time, colonizers forced the Abenaki from their ancestral land by imposing systems of land ownership onto the region (Our History, n.d.). Much of the Abenaki population that lived in Vermont was forced to flee north to Québec, where the present-day Abenaki communities at the Odanak and Wôlinak reservations still show evidence of Abenaki populations augmented by refugees of colonization (Snow & Filice, 2018). The Abenaki people that remained in Vermont were subjected to a century of systematic erasure, such that specific information about their experiences with national schemes to eradicate Native peoples (such as the Indian boarding schools that resulted from the 1819 Civilization Fund Act (Pember, 2019)) is difficult to find. Despite the relative invisibility of Native experiences in historical resources from the 19th and 20th centuries, it is well-documented that the Eugenics Survey of Vermont targeted Abenaki communities, causing further damage to the Vermont population that had already suffered centuries of violence and dispossession. Between 1931 and 1957, the eugenics program forced sterilizations on 253 people in Vermont (Kaelber, 2009). According to the website

Vermont Eugenics, these sterilizations were largely perpetrated against people whose ancestry was Abenaki or French Canadian (2009). The legacy of this harm is so fresh that Chief Don Stevens, of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki, recounts how his own grandmother was targeted for sterilization by the survey (Silberman, 2019).

Recently, the state of Vermont has begun some preliminary legislative work to recognize Abenaki communities and their continued presence on the land. Bill H.716, passed in July of 2020, grants state-recognized Abenaki tribes free hunting and fishing licenses (Bill Status H.716 (Act 143), 2020). Although this legislation is a step in the right direction, it still bears the stamp of state-imposed restrictions. It has not gone unnoticed that these restrictions are substantially greater than those that apply to the free senior hunting and fishing licenses that are distributed by the state to any Vermonter over the age of 66 (Gokee, 2020). Another initial effort by the State of Vermont to acknowledge Abenaki heritage is Bill H.880, which stipulates that Abenaki place names must be added to state park signs (Bill Status H.880 (Act 174), 2020). This action is a powerful acknowledgement by the state that the Abenaki are still here, and have been here, in this place, for far longer than the people whose names it bears (Gokee, 2020).

BACKGROUND

BLACK VERMONTERS – HISTORY, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Black people have lived in Vermont for centuries. The pervasive narrative that “Vermont is so white” erases Black individuals and communities from the state’s social and physical landscapes. In 1777, Vermont ratified a state constitution that outlawed the enslavement of male individuals over the age of 21 and female individuals over the age of 18 (Constitution of Vermont, 1777). Contrary to many modern interpretations of this document, the constitution did not, in fact, outlaw slavery in all its forms. For decades to come, children could be legally enslaved in Vermont. Further, the constitution permitted the enslavement of people who were “bound by their own consent” or “bound by law, for the payments of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like” (1777). Contrary to the popular modern narrative, White Vermonters with the power of skin color and capital participated in the enslavement and trade of human beings as property in the state. Efforts to reshape this history to portray the state of Vermont as a trailblazing site of abolition ignore the true legacy of harm inflicted upon Black Vermonters (O’Connor, 2016). These efforts further conceal the enduring presence and influence of Black people in Vermont.

Common reshapings of Vermont’s history also ignore the many Black families that settled in Vermont in the 18th and 19th centuries. The relative number of Black Vermonters was greater in the early 1900s than it is today. For example, the town of Vergennes was 7% Black in 1790 – today, the Vergennes population is .2% Black (Corwin, n.d.). In her book [Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790-1890](#), Elise Guyette explores the history of two Black families that settled in Hinesburg, Vermont. These families—the Clarks and the Peterses—were successful farmers, clearing the land from old-growth forest and raising diverse crops and livestock. After a century of working that land, though, the

descendants of the original Clark and Peters settlers were forced away from their generational livelihood by pre-Civil War agricultural industrialization. These technological and, by extension, economic changes took an especially hard toll on Black farmers who were unable to secure loans from banks that dealt in racial discrimination (Guyette, 2010). Guyette asserts that the Clark and Peters families’ stories are not unique; it’s just that these are not the stories that are amplified in the telling of Vermont’s history.

In 2020, Black farmers still make up a small yet important and overlooked percentage of the nearly 7000 farms in Vermont (US Department of Agriculture, 2017). Black-owned farms, such as the Clemmons Family Farm in Charlotte, Vermont, celebrate the ancestral knowledge and care for land that has passed through generations of Black land stewards in the face of unrelenting dispossession of self, life, and property (Who We Are, n.d.). Other Black farmers, like Earl Ransom of Strafford Organic Creamery, note that the very fact of their occupation intersecting with their race is an act of resistance (Dillon, 2020).

Working the soil is but one way that Black Vermonters connect to the land. Mirna Valerio, a professional ultra runner based in Montpelier, Vermont, says that trail running is a way of cultivating love: “love for my physical body, my mental body, my emotional body and my spiritual body” (Hil, 2020). She shares her connection to the land on social media, meanwhile intentionally increasing the visibility of Black athletes in outdoor spaces—particularly in Vermont. Dr. Carolyn Finney is another prominent, Vermont-based advocate for Black voices in outdoor spaces. She is a storyteller, traveler, cultural interrogator, and environmentalist, who uses her platform to call attention to the violent racism that often defines society in the United States: “by default, black people are perceived as a threat to white people’s physical safety” (Finney, 2020). Having spent much of her life building

relationship to outdoor spaces around the world, Finney shares widely the message that everyone's story matters, but the amplification of Black voices in the outdoors can cultivate feelings of belonging for those who have been systematically excluded (McMenamin, 2020). In her work, Finney emphasizes that no space in America is immune to the toxicity of racism, and thus, outdoor spaces are no exception.

In an interview in late October, Finney emphasized the importance of storytelling in successful research and public outreach. As a self-identified storyteller, Finney believes that "there is a false delineation between big data and stories" (Finney, 2020). She teaches that there must be a reframing of the relationship between data and stories from "hierarchical to relational." In our discussions about FPR's future work, including data collection, Finney strongly encouraged that the work be framed around questions like: what is the intention of the data? Who is the data for? "What is our responsibility in the way that we make that data available to the public?" Finney eloquently noted that people are not just what they think but how they feel, through equally valuing the power of data and stories FPR can build a real relationship with their Vermont community and strengthen new channels of communication.

The experiences of Black outdoors people outside of Vermont are becoming more readily visible, audible, and more widely shared thanks to the storytelling platforms created by the internet. Among those voices is that of Latria Graham, a journalist and fifth-generation farmer from South Carolina. Reflecting on the multitude of Black voices that are stating loudly and clearly their experiences, Graham writes, "even when white guilt, complacency, and intentional neglect try to erase our presence, there is always a trace. Now there are hundreds of us, if not thousands, intent on blazing a trail" (Graham, 2020). The history of racism, abuse, and a lack of justice towards Black Americans has undeniably seeped into every aspect of life, even a walk in the woods. A woman coming off a back surgery, Graham carries a Ruger P89DC to protect herself, but she often wonders if it would be safer to not carry the gun despite the threats she has experienced.

With the killings of Philando Castile and those alike, she weighs the idea of how she appears as a Black American carrying a weapon. She has been the target of death threats since 2015 when she started writing about race, but she provokes a sense of optimism that she will continue on her mission regardless because you "only learn to eat fire, by eating fire." Her personal story empowers her fellow Black outdoorsmen by saying they are not alone – and they are entitled to this land just as anyone else is (Graham, 2020). There are few things that grip us as viscerally as stories do. There is something about listening intently to another person's story that transports you into their shoes and allows you a sense of empathy you cannot generate yourself. Stories bring breadth of new knowledge and allows the listener to bring new perspectives to the conversation. That is why storytelling needs to become part of the FPR's DNA in order to generate momentum towards Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion goals. By leveraging the voices of Black and Brown colleagues or friends, their words are amplified and better understood.

PROJECT METHODS

We conducted research in three different stages, first focusing on educating ourselves on racial exclusion and access to outdoor recreation (as seen in the project background). After that, we shifted towards researching case studies that relate to structural changes in organizations such as LA Parks and Recreation and Anacostia Park (further discussed in case studies). Finally, we synthesized all of our work for ease of access and understanding by FPR, in the form of this report. The structure of this report borrows from existing resources that seek to offer action steps for anti-racism in the outdoors. The most influential of those resources were a [letter urging anti-racist action in the Appalachian Mountain Club](#) (July 2020) and an [Atlantic article](#) (2020) spelling out concrete steps towards a more inclusive outdoors. If these resources are unfamiliar, we highly recommend that you explore them as a complement to this document.

As we were researching, we came across many people whose voices we felt would support and strengthen our capacity to share the information that is included in this report. We reached out, persistently, to several of those people, and were able to meet only with a very small subset of those with whom we had hoped to speak. This challenge precipitated an important conversation within our group, the central question of which was: why do we feel entitled to people's time? In examining this question, we considered the various privileges afforded to us as individuals, on the basis of access to education, race, gender, and socioeconomic standing, among others. We landed on the uncomfortable reality that much of academia involves being conditioned to feel entitled to knowledge, information, and understanding, the roots of which can be traced to white supremacist ideas about who creates and accesses truth. This relationship to knowledge-sharing evades reciprocity. Reciprocity is critical to the foundations of anti-racism, which are listening, caring, and acting. Among prominent voices in the work towards racial justice, there is a palpable feeling of

exhaustion from the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who are taking on the work of dismantling white supremacy. The entitlement of people to ask for their time without proposing channels of reciprocity certainly contributes to that exhaustion. There is consensus in the words of the people who are doing the work of anti-racism: reciprocity involves compensation. A critical shortcoming of our work is that we were unable to offer compensation in gratitude for people's time. We want to emphasize that FPR should prioritize its capacity to offer compensation to anyone whose time they seek in the undertaking of this work, and that the level of compensation be determined by the individual whose time they are seeking.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IMMEDIATE

- **Release a statement in solidarity with Black Lives that unequivocally states that Black Lives Matter**
 - Black Lives Matter is both a value statement and a political/social movement. In stating that Black Lives Matter, FPR is condemning police brutality and showing solidarity to support an entire group of American people and taking a stance on a historic push for equality.
- **Create and publish an action plan for anti-racism within FPR and on Vermont Public Lands**
 - Rationale: Making an anti-racist statement is an important first step, but in order for that statement to take on a life that is not simply performative, FPR needs to demonstrate to the public that they have a plan for acting on the anti-racist sentiment of their words.
- **Publish a land acknowledgement recognizing that all Vermont Public Lands are on unceded Abenaki territory. Reach out to Abenaki communities to ask how they would like their history and present to be acknowledged**
 - Acknowledging historical atrocities, colonialism and unjust forms of land acquisition is a first step in creating positive social change. Recognition opens up broader discussion of the ethics surrounding recreation and decision making regarding the land.
- **Share this document vertically and horizontally through the FPR employee and administrative network**
 - We hope to stress the importance of conversation surrounding the issues raised in this document. All employees should be aware of the changes and values FPR is striving to achieve.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SHORT TERM

3 Months - 1 year

- **Create a departmental position devoted to DEI coordination**
 - **The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Capacity Building Program is an example of a potential funding source for such a position.**
 - These recommendations cannot be undertaken in a meaningful way by simply increasing the workloads of current staff. In hiring a person whose expertise and training is specific to racial equity and justice, FPR will take a preliminary step towards structural shifts in the department. An effective diversity coordinator is involved in HR, marketing, communications, operations, and innovation so that FPR is authentically serving its base.
- **Improve and increase online resources, including:**
 - **A website dedicated to the sharing of information and resources pertinent to anti-racist work on Vermont's public land. These resources should include:**
 - **A comprehensive land acknowledgement and history of Abenaki relationship to the land now known as Vermont**
 - **A revisionary history of Vermont's public lands, with great emphasis placed on the white supremacist history of "public" land acquisition in the state of Vermont, including the state history of eugenics**
 - **Area-specific resources about how to feel safe in outdoor spaces as a BIPOC person or group of people**
 - **Job and job training opportunities (paid only)**
 - **Grant opportunities specific to DEI work**
 - **Broader social media representation, including intentional, unequivocal engagement with and support for organizations and individuals working explicitly to increase BIPOC visibility in outdoor spaces, including:**
 - **Mirna Valerio (@themirnavator)**
 - **Black Outside, Inc. (@blackoutside_inc)**
 - **Color Outside (@wecoloroutside)**
 - **Black Folks Camp Too (@blackfolkscamptoo)**
 - **Blackpackers (Facebook: @COBlackpackers)**
 - **Melanin Base Camp (@melaninbasecamp)**
 - **Indigenous Women Hike (@indigenouswomenhike)**
 - Social media and other web outlets are powerful tools to dismantle white supremacist systems of land interaction. FPR can begin to deconstruct their own roots in white supremacist land acquisition and management by utilizing the power of social media to educate and communicate. By making a conscious effort to say loudly, "You belong here. You are welcome here," FPR can begin to foster safe and welcoming spaces for outdoorspeople of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SHORT TERM

3 Months - 1 year

- **Launch a storytelling initiative that amplifies the stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color on Vermont's Public Lands**
 - **Partner with established organizations like WeGotNext to elevate storytellers of color and spread the practice of storytelling in relationship to Vermont's Public Lands.**
 - **Look to the Vermont African American Heritage Trail and Abenaki Trails Project for potential partnership and structure for place-based education and storytelling.**
 - **See Native Perspectives on Public Land and Tribal Preservation.**
 - Storytelling is a powerful tool for activating change, building resilient communities, and fortifying identities (WeGotNext). As structural barriers remain in the Vermont community we are unable to build strong coalitions and relationships with those FPR seeks to engage. Storytelling offers a personal lived experience that can be used as a compelling tool to increase engagement if FPR gives enough attention and value to listening.
- **Initiate genuine relationship with Vermont's Abenaki communities**
 - **Contact chiefs to respectfully ask for, listen to, and ACT ON their input. The guiding question in these conversations should be: "What can FPR do for Vermont Abenaki communities?"**
 - **Roger Longtoe Sheehan (Elnu Abenaki Tribe)**
 - **Don Stevens (Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe)**
 - **Paul J. Bunnell (Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation)**
 - **Richard Menard (Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi)**
 - **Create a formal partnership with the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs**
 - Bills such as the H.880 are on the Governor's table to be signed that put Abenaki place names on State lands. With such great momentum for the Abenaki tribe, FPR should also play an integral role in building a better relationship with Abenaki communities. As managers of state lands, FPR should take a front-seat stance in recognizing Abenaki history as this will symbolize a dedication to inclusion efforts and understanding the cultural history of the lands FPR manages.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SHORT TERM

3 Months - 1 year

- **Collect data for the purposes of administrative accountability and community input**
 - **See: NPS Breaking Barriers Project, Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment**
 - **Use data to figure out exactly where to concentrate outreach: which specific communities could benefit most from increased accessibility efforts? What should those efforts look like?**
 - **Ask underrepresented communities: "What do you need / want from Vermont's Public Lands?"**
- Collecting data and publishing it on the FPR website and associated resources is a symbol of accountability to DEI efforts. Those who peruse the data will understand that FPR is dedicated to DEI initiatives and thus, should send a good message. Additionally, communities should be encouraged to reach out to FPR to ask questions about these data so that constant communication can build coalitions with Vermont residents. Data broadly are also very effective tools for keeping DEI leaders in the FPR organization accountable to themselves and FPR's fellow colleagues.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LONG TERM

1 - 10 years

- **Hire Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to leadership positions**
 - **Train, recruit, and otherwise incentivize candidates for positions NOT exclusive to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work but to the department's larger mission.**
 - **Partner with Greening Youth Foundation to seek out, train, and create pathways to sustained employment for young people.**
 - Systematic barriers to entry are far greater for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Creating pathways to employment is a way of circumventing structural barriers associated with access to higher education, disproportionate poverty rates, and proximity to green spaces.
- **Create and offer programming and resources that extend beyond outdoor recreation**
 - **Summer lunch programs for students experiencing food insecurity**
 - **Free or subsidized child care in the form of after school or school vacation programming**
 - **Land-based and activity-based youth mentorship programs such as Mentored Hunt at John Heinz**
 - Other than the obvious statement that all people deserve fresh, hot food, programs have used free meals as an incentive for increased community engagement. For example, LA Summer Night Lights served over 380,000 meals over the summer and found a significant increase in park recreation and decrease in violent incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LONG TERM

1 - 10 years

- **Eliminate barriers to access**
 - **Offer free and or affordable transportation to and from public parks**
 - **Create a public gear library**
 - **Offer free or subsidized pathways to participation such as summer camps, group hikes, classes covering a range of topics from art, to music, to various forms of recreation accessible to all abilities**
 - **Financially and logistically support BIPOC affinity groups' visiting and recreating on Vermont Public Lands**
 - Studies have shown (e.g. [GYF Survey](#)) that lack of secure positions is a barrier to access for interns of color. Other studies (e.g. [PA DCNR](#)) have indicated that transportation is another limiting factor in park recreation. 41% of Black people surveyed stated lack of public transportation as the primary reason for not visiting state parks. Providing transportation will remove some economic constraints on recreation.
- **Partner with non-traditional outdoor organizations to engage and welcome folks of many interests**
 - **See: [Susu Healing Collective and CommUNITY Farm, Vermont Humanities Words in the Woods](#)**
 - **Burlington Community Gardens to create a community pollinator garden**
 - Common recreational activities in Vermont (including skiing, biking, running, and hiking) exclude folks from all backgrounds because they are resource intensive and difficult to pick-up without training and time investment. Promoting a diverse range of activities is more inclusive to a range of people with different interests and cultural or economic backgrounds. These programs benefit everyone by reimagining ways to interact with nature that are not defined by access to certain resources, physical ability, or cultural structures.
- **Increase community agency and involvement in the creation and maintenance of public spaces and recreation areas**
 - **Identify areas of recreational growth (mountain biking, for example) that require parallel growth in infrastructure and management. Intentionally include historically excluded and silenced communities.**
 - **See: [Aboriginal Youth Mountain Bike Program](#)**
 - **Rematriate lands to Abenaki communities; cede management of those lands to Abenaki communities**
 - **See: [Nulhegan Abenaki Tribal Forest](#)**
 - A powerful way to engage communities that have been historically excluded from public lands is to give those communities a meaningful voice in their management, such that the lands can act in the interest of the community. Land-based programs that stimulate local economies, or lands that are managed by communities to best suit their needs begin to redistribute the power that has been historically held by largely white land administrators.

CASE STUDY: ANACOSTIA PARK AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

The Anacostia Park and Community Collaborative (APACC) was created with the goal of bettering the social, mental, physical, spiritual, and economic wellbeing of the residents living in communities near the Anacostia River in Washington DC. APACC was founded after the Anacostia Waterfront Trust received a three-year capacity building grant funded by several local foundations including Chesapeake Bay Trust, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Keith Campbell Foundation, and many more. Within those three years and beyond, APACC has flourished. This community-powered collective holds its power in its diverse network of partnerships with parks, people, environmental groups, and social service organizations.

In the decades before Anacostia Park was transformed, the predominately African American residents of the surrounding dense urban neighborhoods experienced disproportionate air pollution due to open-air landfill fires causing high rates of asthma and other public health disparities. In workshop presentations available on the APACC website, organizers share that APACC prioritizes actions that elevate the voices of those who have been

historically silenced or excluded from the table. APACC is successfully building a community-based vision for the Anacostia River Corridor through transparent and informed park programming, events, and outreach. This is accomplished through a shared calendar of events, a Facebook group of practitioners for sharing resources and coordination, and educational capacity building workshops. Within the APACC, the Anacostia Park Meaningful Engagement Cohort attends workshops and events led by Akiima Price, Community Liaison to Anacostia Park, and Erin Garnaas-Holmes, Ambassador to the Anacostia Watershed Urban Waters Partnership. All are welcome to attend the meetings and all workshop PowerPoints and materials are available for free on the APACC website. These workshops allow participating partner organizations to build relationships with park visitors and prototype engagement activities to better connect with "hard to reach" communities in Ward 7 and Ward 8 of the District of Columbia. For example, one workshop from September 17, 2019 covers trauma-informed park engagement which discusses the importance of

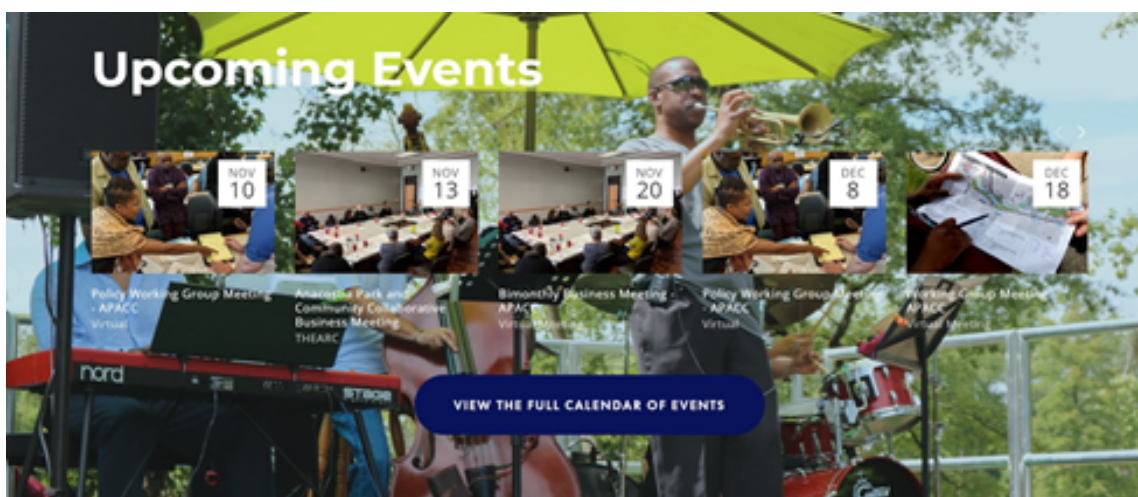


Image above is taken from the APACC homepage and shows examples of upcoming events.

CASE STUDY: ANACOSTIA PARK AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

outdoor engagement during a traumatic period like the COVID-19 pandemic and teaches attendees how to care for each other and park visitors.

In an interview with Kerry-Ann Hamilton, National Park Foundation community liaison Akiima Price discusses the importance of reimagining meaningful park and environmental engagement to match the values of the communities of color who frequent Anacostia Park (Hamilton, 2020). For example, Anacostia Park is the only National Park with a waterfront skating pavilion. The APACC website currently flaunts a community calendar full of events like volunteer hours removing invasive plants, litter clean up, and trail maintenance to music and arts celebration. In the initial project description, FPR

asked our group to question their outdoor engagement programing and ask whether FPR's programing was limiting diverse engagement due to a lack of interest by underrepresented groups. APACC addresses this question of desirability head on by offering multiple points of engagement to encourage folks of all interests to participate. The website also includes pertinent information like park issues, descriptions of upcoming public hearings, comment sections, and policy working group meetings. APACC reports hosting six monthly events with over 2,000 attendees in which 20 partner organizations participated, 15 community members volunteered, 2,000 students and families participated, and through which 20 new partners were added.

Disparities Across the River

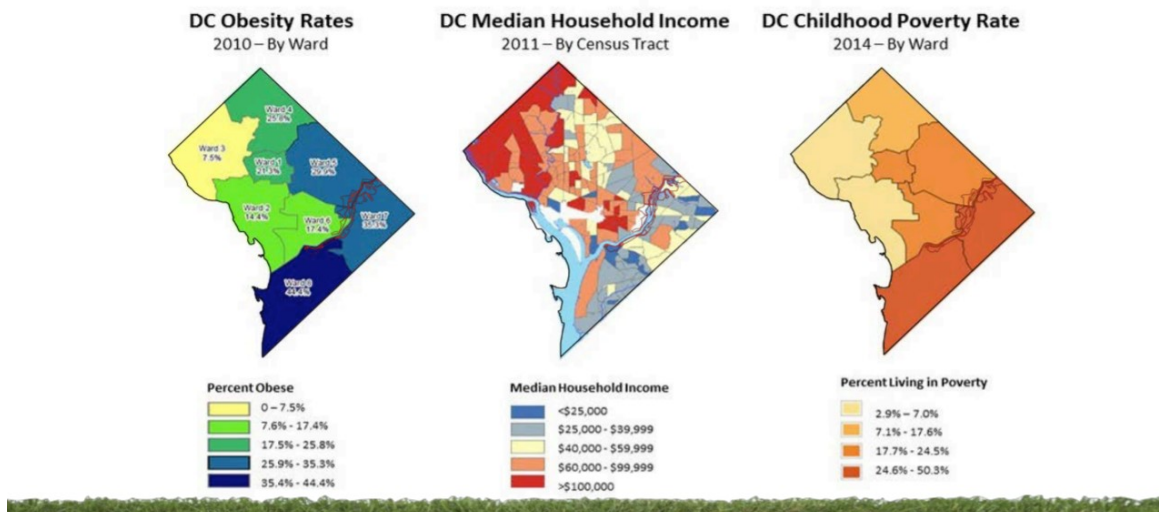
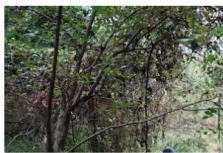


Image above is taken from Anacostia Park Meaningful Engagement Cohort workshop materials about APACC progress and future work.

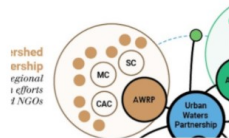
CASE STUDY: ANACOSTIA PARK AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

News and Updates



A fight for forest equity in Southeast D.C. takes on new urgency amid pandemic

Dec 8, 2020



What is the Urban Waters Federal Partnership?

Nov 5, 2020



Growing a "Meaningful" New Friends Group for Anacostia Park

Oct 2, 2020



Catch Episode 3 of our Urban Nature Healing Fall 2020 Webinar Series tomorrow!

Sep 23, 2020



APACC is supporting COVID-19 and Census 2020 outreach led by Anacostia Coordinating Council

Sep 4, 2020

Image above is taken from the APACC homepage showing recently published stories and reporting.

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR FPR:

1. Maintaining open and updated channels of communication with partner organizations and the public, including social media.

The APACC website allows for easy navigation and engagement with everything from events for the day to suggesting new programming to volunteering with one of many partner organizations. The accessibility and transparency of all pertinent information encourages all users to not only show up for events that interest them but return and continue build their relationship with the park and community.

2. Free and accessible workshop and educational materials:

Providing educational, engaging, and free workshops are a phenomenal way to build more active and receptive communities which will support the work of FPR on the ground. FPR employees should not be the only ones responsible for making state lands more welcoming to underrepresented people. This way FPR is also held accountable solidifying and maintaining partnerships with experts and advocacy organizations and for continuing their own education. Finally, posting free educational materials online increases equitable accessibility to community members without the resources to attend live workshops.

3. Utilization of data and communication with data:

Collecting demographic and frequency data about park and APACC engagement will provide FPR with a more complete picture of the work they have in front of them - who is showing up and how frequent. By publishing these data, FPR will be required to openly address what the data show and how engagement data will change their future work.

CASE STUDY: LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

The LA County Department of Parks and Recreation manages 182 parks in Los Angeles County. They benefit the greater Los Angeles community by providing services ranging from free meals to sports teams and parenting classes (Who We Are | City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, n.d.). In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the LA County DPR reallocated funds to serve the community in the following ways:

- 1700 spots in day camps for children whose parents are essential workers
- Scholarships to day camps for groundworkers, maintenance workers, restaurant workers whose children needed care
- Homeless shelters at parks
- Bi-weekly food banks

These actions demonstrate the ways in which public spaces, and public lands in particular, can function as resources beyond sites for recreation. In a time of emergency, the LA County DPR was able to shift their priorities to address communities' immediate needs. In less urgent times, the LA County DPR fosters equitable access to public lands in many ways:

- Leadership positions occupied by folks representing historically excluded identities
- Free lending program for camping equipment
- Opportunities to camp in parks close to lower-income communities whose residents would be disproportionately burdened by the cost of travel to a far-away park
- Summer lunch program for kids
- Huge range of public programs and services (not limited to outdoor rec), i.e. parenting classes, nutrition classes, reading programs, after-school programs, all the sports

These programs begin the work of dismantling the barriers to access that exist for people who are impacted most by structural and environmental racism.

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR FPR:

The LA County DPR accesses funding on the county, state, and federal level to offer programming that extends far beyond outdoor recreation. LA County residents thus come to know their public lands as more than sites of recreation; they are critical public resources. In the area of outdoor recreation, the LA County DPR deconstructs economic barriers associated with travel and equipment, which permits individuals and communities to access activities and places that they would have been otherwise excluded from on the basis of cost.

CASE STUDY: ABORIGINAL YOUTH MOUNTAIN BIKE PROGRAM

The Aboriginal Youth Mountain Biking Project (AYMBP) is a program driven by volunteers with the aim to support the Aboriginal first nation engage in the sport of mountain biking. The organization is based in British Columbia. The program was born in an atmosphere of building tension between trailbuilders and native populations about how the land should be used. However, when younger groups of the Aboriginal tribe started to develop an interest in mountain biking, Thomas Schoen worked with the Chiefs to help give the youth access to bikes. As the program grew, they took on their first trail building project of a small park in the area.

Since then, AYMBP has continued to support Aboriginal youth in both access to bikes and the tools and training for trail building. This has allowed the native tribes to build trails in ways that respect their culture, empowering them to be leaders in the outdoor community of British Columbia

The impact of AYMBP must be considered in the context of the mountain biking industry's growth in recent years. There have been small communities that have found new life through the activity that mountain biking has created as more people develop interest in the sport. However, Recreation and adventure sports benefit from patterns of colonialism and have historically contributed to the erasure of ingenuous peoples from the land. This is seen in British Columbia with the past disagreements between trailbuilders and Indigenous people. AYMBP has given the Aboriginal community the agency to build trails that fit their needs and beliefs and also benefit from the tourism that the trails bring.

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR FPR:

The primary takeaway in looking at the work done by AYMBP is the importance of grassroots work. By involving the parties who are impacted by the growing recreation in the area, a more meaningful solution was able to be developed. While Vermont does have grassroots driven programs like VMBA, making the effort to include new voices in already existing movements can bring new energy.

CONCLUSION

The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation tasked us with laying the groundwork in pursuit of their goal of "Public Participation for All." We have framed our research by sharing background educational materials that speak on the presence of the Abenaki Tribe in Vermont as well as the lived experiences of BIPOC individuals in the outdoors. By utilizing interviews and extensive research, our group has devised a list of recommendations for FPR in their of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals. These recommendations range from immediate (within 3 months) to short-term (3 months - 1 year) finally to long-term (1 - 10 years). Our case studies are examples of some of the recommendations we have listed manifesting themselves in different organizations across the country with similar characteristics to FPR.

By compiling a list of recommendations that span a long period of time, our group hopes not only to lay the groundwork for FPR's work, but also to drive larger changes in the future that will have profound impact. Despite the global pandemic, we believe that the national momentum centered on racial and social justice efforts over the last six months creates opportunity for FPR to lead by example. At the heart of FPR is an appreciation of the diversity Vermont has to offer, and the organization's desire to broaden the scope of that diversity in pursuit of engaging more BIPOC to state lands is motivating and exciting. We truly believe that the recommendations and the educational materials outlined in this report are not only powerful changes, but also attainable ones. That is not to say that we expect success overnight, however, consistent effort to keep in mind DEI goals and initiatives when making organizational decisions will alter the fabric of FPR in a good way. A collective vision is necessary for movements to spur change. Individual visions can be powerful, but we are stronger together than alone. We hope that these materials will act as an inspiration for the collective vision FPR creates for success.



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead



Middlebury



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